DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 162 252 CS 004 379

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TITLE Comprehensive Secondary Reading Programs: Toward Some Workable Compromises.
PUB DATE May 78
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (23rd, Houston, Texas, May 1-5, 1978); For related documents, see CS004387, CS004389, CS004392, and CS004413

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Committees; *Comprehensive Programs; *Content Reading; Inservice Teacher Education; Intercommunication; *Interdisciplinary Approach; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Programs; *Remedial Reading Programs; Secondary Education

ABSTRACT

Six suggestions for comprehensive secondary reading programs were developed after consideration of comments made by Judith A. Boettcher, Anne E. Newton, Randall J. Ryder, and Roger C. Goggins (see related documents). The suggestions are as follows: (1) A comprehensive program must deal with all students who need help; thus, there should be a content area program, a remedial program, and possibly a developmental program. (2) Someone must be responsible for ensuring that good liaison is maintained among the people who contribute to a comprehensive program. (3) A remedial services committee should be formed to decide what special services the school will offer, screen students, coordinate ongoing programs, and evaluate the special programs. (4) A content area reading committee, which includes the reading teacher and teachers from all the content areas, would be helpful in keeping teachers informed about the reading program and their students' progress. (5) It is important to provide inservice training in which content area teachers can learn about specific procedures for developing students' reading skills. (6) Among the factors in remedial reading programs that need attention are program duration, consistency, and diversity; intensity of instruction; and teachers' knowledge of materials. (GW)

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COMPREHENSIVE SECONDARY READING PROGRAMS:

TOWARD SOME WORKABLE COMPROMISES

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CS004379

Paper presented at the International Reading Association Convention, May, 1978, Houston, Texas

In planning this symposium, my idea was that the four papers you have just heard (Boettcher, 1978; Googins, 1978; Newton, 1978; Ryder, 1978) would reveal some real conflicts between those of us who work in the sometimes unreal world of the university and teachers who are faced daily with the problem of helping kids learn to read well. However, at least on first hearing, the papers do not seem to reveal much conflict. Certainly, they don't reveal the sort of the conflict I was expecting, conflict exemplified by Anne and Roger's repeatedly noting that Judy's and Randy's ideas are unworkable in the real world, that such and such would be fine if teachers worked with 5 to 10 students each hour but isn't feasible when, as is much more frequently the case, teachers work with 10 to 40 kids each hour.

Considered from the point of view of adding zest to the symposium, the failure of this sort of conflict to emerge is unfortunate. However, considered from the point of view of helping kids learn to read well, it is very fortunate that public school people and university people are in substantial agreement. We do, after all, have the same goal; and I am firmly convinced that if we are ever to create anything like optimal reading programs, it is going to take the work of both groups.

Saying that the conflict I had expected to occur did not does not mean that there are no differences. Certainly, there were differences and different emphases between the remedial programs suggested by Judy and by Anne and between the content area programs suggested by Randy and Roger. In preparing the comments that follow, I have tried to take these differences into account. I have also tried very hard to consider the practicality of any of the suggestions I make here, for I think that

in many ways the suggestions of Anne and Roger as well as those of Judy and Randy have been at least somewhat idealistic.

The comments that follow fall into six sections. The first section considers the comprehensiveness of the program that we have described. The second stresses the importance of laison among the various people that contribute to a comprehensive program. The third and fourth argue for establishing a remedial services committee and a content area reading committee. And the fifth and sixth concern specifics of the content area program and the remedial program.

Comprehensiveness of Program

One rather obvious must for a successful comprehensive secondary reading program is that the program be in fact comprehensive. I believe we have been remiss here today in that we did not sketch a program that was necessarily comprehensive. In particular, although Randy mentioned the possibility that the skills necessary for reading in various content areas might be taught in a separate reading class, we gave no other attention to the notion of a developmental reading class. By a developmental reading class, I mean a separate class for students who already read adequately but who need or want to further their reading skills. Such a class might include work in study skills, library skills, reading in various content fields, critical reading, and rate. Of course, in an ideal world, all of this would be handled within the various content area classrooms, but asking that content teachers handle all of this, particularly if they are just beginning to work with reading, may not be realistic.

Another factor to be considered in assessing the comprehensiveness of a reading program is the availability of other programs. I'm thinking particularly of special education programs and of school-within-a-school programs for disruptive students. Just what a remedial reading program needs to deal with will depend partly on what services students have available elsewhere. If students have reading instruction available in various other programs, then the remedial program may be fairly narrow. If, on the other hand, there are no other programs, the remedial program may need to service students with a broad range of difficulties.

School-Wide Liaison

Closely related to the notion of comprehensive programs is the notion of providing good liaison among the various people that make up a comprehensive program. In fact, saying that good liaison is closely related to comprehensive programs is a gross understatement. A program that lacks good liaison simply can't be comprehensive.

Each of the speakers has commented on the importance of good liaison, but I think the topic is important enough to warrant further comments. If good liaison is to be maintained, someone has to be in charge of insuring it. The logical person is the reading teacher (or "reading coordinator" if this term is to be used to designate the head reading teacher in a school), and, as Roger pointed out, the reading coordinator must be given time to do his or her job. In Minnesota the movement to get reading teachers out of their labs and into working with other teachers began about five years ago. Originally, however, reading teachers were

asked to teach their normal five to six class load and work with content area teachers too. As could have been predicted nothing happened. More recently, it has become common to give reading teachers' three classes and leave them the rest of the time to work with content area teachers; and under this plan, work is finally getting done. Thus, I'm very much in agreement with both Anne and Roger that a reading teacher needs time for liaison work. However, I don't resonate to Roger's suggestion that the state pay half the coordinator's salary; not that it isn't a good idea, it just doesn't seem likely, and I think we can build a good program with less than a full time coordinator.

Continuing the subject of liaison, I'd like to respond to Roger's suggestion of liaison with elementary feeder schools. Certainly, such liaison is desirable, but I think we have to realize that at least in many cases, contact with feeder schools is going to be minimal. Good liaison within a school may be a more reachable goal. I have some similar scepticism about Anne's suggestion for a weekly meeting of district reading teachers, although I do think that such meetings could be tremendously important, both for sharing ideas and for building and maintaining morale.

Finally, on the matter of liaison there is the question of just who needs to be involved. Among those that need to be communicating with the reading teacher are the administrative and counseling staff, teachers of other special programs, content area teachers, and parents. This leads to my next topic.

Remedial Services Committee

I believe that a comprehensive program needs a remedial services committee. By a remedial services committee I am referring to a standing committee that would be responsible for (1) deciding just which special services the school would offer, (2) screening students in order to insure that those that need special help get it and get in the appropriate program, (3) coordinating the ongoing programs, and (4) routinely evaluating the special programs including the reading program. Such a committee would include the reading teacher or coordinator, a representative of the administrative or counseling staff, other special teachers, and, I would hope, a parent or parents.

I would like to make two specific remarks about the committee's tasks. The first concerns screening. In addition to the various sources of referrals that Anne mentioned -- teachers, students themselves, guidance counselors, and the special services personnel themselves -- the committee needs to establish some formal testing.

Before we do anything to assist readers in improving their reading performance, we have to identify their present reading ability. Routine schoolwide screening using some sort of objective and probably commercial test seems to me to be the only practical way to accomplish such screening.

The sort of test I'm thinking of is essentially used to identify students who do not need any special help in reading. In other words we give this test and establish for it a cutoff point above which we can be reasonably certain the students can survive pretty well in the majority of the reading they are required to do without special instruction.

This test should be valid, reliable, economical (in terms of both money and time), and easily and quickly scorable. It should be given to all students at the beginning of every other year or when they enter the school. And the results of the test should be made readily available to all teachers and to the remedial services committee.

The second remark I will make about the committee's task concerns selecting services, placing students in appropriate programs, and evaluating programs. It is just this. Unless there is an unbiased committee (one that isn't run unilaterally by reading, or special education, or some other special interest group) proper selection of services, appropriate placement of students, and candid evaluations are unlikely.

Content Area Reading Committee

At this point, I'm going to suggest another committee, a content area reading committee. I feel very uneasy suggesting a second committee -- with all the time and effort a committee demands -- in an address in which I specifically said I would be guided by the need to be practical. At the same time, there must be frequent, long-term, and honest communication between the content area teachers and the reading teacher if the reading program is to compliment the content program and if content teachers are actively to facilitate their students' growth in reading. Consequently, I believe that a committee which includes the reading teacher and at least one teacher representing each of the content areas in which reading plays a substantial part is necessary. Such a committee, by providing a relatively direct and routinely used line of communication between the reading program and the school's regular content

programs, would serve a number of functions. It would perform the general function of keeping teachers informed about what was going on in the reading program and special reading classes, thereby avoiding a good deal of ill-will which stems from simple lack of knowledge. It would be the vehicle through which teachers received specific data on the capabilities of their students who have serious reading problems and are in remedial reading programs. And it might be the vehicle through which teachers continually work to become more proficient at developing their students' reading skills. I'll say more about this last point in a moment.

The Content Area Program

I turn now to the matter of the content area reading program itself. In discussing this topic, both Randy and Roger chose to focus almost exclusively on the matter of providing in-service training for content area teachers Their concern for this aspect of the content area program is well founded. Teachers must see the need for a program, accept a program, and learn to use a program if there is going to be one. And finding ways of getting teachers to see the need for, accept, and learn to use a content area program is no mean feat. However, because Randy and Roger have elaborated on this matter in some detail, I only want to make one comment here -- and it's related to the point I just made about the content area reading committee's being a vehicle for teacher training. The most successful content area reading program I've seen began with two teachers in each of eight areas working intensively with consultants over a one year period and then serving as instructors for

the other teachers in these areas beginning the following year.

I'd very much recommend that those of you considering beginning a program, consider such a model. And I would note that the teachers participating in the initial training sessions could be those that make up the content area reading committee.

I've noted that Randy and Roger made a reasonable choice in deciding to focus on in-service activities rather than on instructional procedures that content area teachers can use. This doesn't mean, however, that specific procedures aren't needed. Concrete, tangible, workable procedures are, of course, absolutely necessary. Time prevents me from going into detail here, but I would like to very briefly suggest what it is that teachers need to learn. First, they need to learn to evaluate their students -- what they can and can't do. Second they need to learn to evaluate their materials -- not just whether they are easy or difficult but just where difficulties lie and where certain students will be likely to have problems. And, third, they need to learn to use specific procedures which don't take impossible amounts of their time or of the class time and which allow them to facilitate the development of students' reading skills while teaching content. I've written about such procedures elsewhere in some detail (Graves, Palmer, & Furniss, 1976). As an example, one such procedure involves the use of questions. Out of the almost countless studies done on questioning, several generalizable findings have emerged (see Anderson & Biddle, 1975). One is that questions that

are at a relatively low level of difficulty placed immediately after the material in which they are answered result both in improved learning about matters that are directly questioned and in improved learning about matters that are not directly questioned. Using questions of this sort in this way is certainly feasible for most content area teachers.

The Remedial Program

I turn now to my last topic, the remedial program. I am in substantial agreement with both Judy and Anne here. I certainly agree with Judy that structure is vital, that success breeds success, that learning demands involvement, that feedback is crucial, and that tutoring is a very powerful mode of instruction. And I agree with Anne that various sorts of evaluation need to be done, that a variety of instructional modes need to be employed, that children need a certain amount of freedom if they are to be involved, and (as I've already said) that liaison is crucial to the program's success.

Beyond this agreement, I'd like to mention five programmatic factors that have not received direct attention. The factors are program duration, intensity of instruction, program consistency, program diversity, and teachers' knowledge of materials. I suspect that each of the speakers would agree with me on the first four of these but that Anne, at least, would disagree with me regarding the fifth one. I'll discuss each very briefly.

Program duration refers to the length of time students spend in a program. We're not going to "fix-up" a student who is four or five years behind in a few months (see Graves, 1976 for further comments).

Program intensity refers to the strength and character of the interaction between the learner and what he is trying to learn. I see a number of students in remedial classes spending much of their time staring blankly. Two modes of instruction that can produce intensity are "direct instruction" (see Berliner & Rosenshine, 1977) and tutoring as described by Ellson (1976).

The meanings of program consistency and program diversity are obvious. To oversimplify things, I believe that a program needs consistency in its scope and sequence but diversity in its presentation mode.

Finally, in mentioning teachers' knowledge of materials, I'm asking for consideration of how many materials a teacher can become thoroughly familiar with. I believe that teachers need to be thoroughly familiar with the materials they use to teach reading (though not with free-reading materials) and that teachers can be thoroughly familiar with a limited number of materials (see Graves & Patberg, 1976 for a program in which teachers have a thorough knowledge of materials and which reflects both consistency and diversity).

Conclusion

By way of conclusion I will present a very brief summary. A comprehensive program must consider and deal with all students that need help; doing so will require a content area program and a remedial program and it may also require a developmental program. Liaison among the various people who contribute to a comprehensive program is vital, and a remedial services committee and a content area reading committee can contribute to effective liaison. Content area programs need to consider

just what content area teachers can feasibly do in their classrooms as well as how to train content area teachers in reading. And remedial programs need to consider such matters as structure, student success, student involvement, feedback, various instructional modes, student choice, liaison with other programs, program duration, program intensity, program consistency, program diversity, and teachers' knowledge of materials.

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